Language Teacher Preparation in Developing Countries: Structuring Pre-Service Teacher Training Programmes

By David Cross

More than any other variable--instructional materials, supplies, administration, class size, and on and on--the quality of teaching has the greatest effect upon the quality of education. Yet, in countries with rapidly growing populations, there is an increasing tendency to put untrained "teachers" into classrooms in a laudable, but utterly misguided effort to meet increased demand or to expand access to schooling. Donors, such as USAID, the British ODA, the World Bank, the African and Asian development banks, etc., encourage and fund projects, but their impact is too often evaluated by the counting of classrooms and heads, rather than by appraising curricula, instructional materials, teacher efficiency, assessment practices, and improvements in learning outcomes. It must be recognised that any rapid expansion of educational provision is usually at the expense of the quality of teacher preparation, and in consequence, the quality of learning.

Appointments of untrained instructors are being made in basic education as well as at the secondary level, where it is happening right across the curriculum. The effects can be devastating, not just on the character of education (which immediately effects the whole of society) but also on the education budget. Attempts to make up for PRESET (pre-service education and training) deficiencies once unskilled people are in service are expensive and largely ineffective. This is because the instructors have to be released for training on full pay rather than the much lower rates paid to full-time teacher trainees. Also, once they are in schools, training has to be carried out sometimes on a costly one-to-one basis in classrooms, rather than the more effective, intensive mode that is available in colleges of education conducted for large homogeneous groups of trainees.

Even where there is some form of teacher preparation, there may well be little relationship between the programme's nature and the real needs of future teachers (and learners). In some cases, programmes were inherited from colonial masters and have remained largely unchallenged ever since. In other cases, the courses are ad hoc, apparently derived from the interests of the faculty rather than from any systematic design. Few trainers, worldwide, have ever received any serious preparation for their roles as methodologists and teacher educators. There is also a sad tendency for some trainers to act as "academics" or "lecturers." They appear not to realise that trainees teach the way that they themselves are taught.

My own view is that initial training programmes should be obligatory and should have a strong bias towards the practical. In this way, trainees will immediately perceive the value of most curriculum components in terms of worthwhile classroom performance objectives. Ideally, experienced classroom teachers and in-service advisers should teach parts of the course. Where they are not involved in curriculum design and course conduct, inspectors and advisers must

know the content and nature of the course, so they can build upon it later with an in-service curriculum that will eventually lead to teacher independence in matters of professional development.

The Ideal Teacher Profile

Initial teacher education programmes should be based upon an ideal teacher profile, if they are to be functional. Each country's profile will be different, depending on its level of development and local constraints, but targets in knowledge and behavior should be defined before training schemes are drawn up and this is done fairly easily by a means of a needs analysis. In essence, the analysis will be concerned with four distinct areas (other analyses will deal with learner needs in terms of curriculum, materials, examinations, and so on):

I. General level of education: Teachers should be well educated people, whatever their specialty. Those constructing the profile should designate the minimum all-round level required for acceptance for initial training. A stipulated status (usually marked by a diploma or degree) should be attained in a school, college, or university before entry to an institute of education.

II. Subject competence: This relates to the level of English needed if the language is to be taught effectively. Again, this competence should be attained before trainees enter the teacher education institution so that training can focus on the teaching of English and related issues without being sidetracked by language weaknesses.

III. Professional competence: This concerns the ideal teachers' ability to plan and execute lessons, to use a textbook selectively, and to produce valid supplementary materials and tests. It concerns their awareness of current approaches, educational theory, cognitive psychology, class management skills, etc. These competencies should be the main ingredients of initial training and of any in-service work that follows.

IV. Attitudes: These are the teachers' beliefs about education, their relationships with students, parents and colleagues, their sense of humor, their level of vocation, their work ethic, their general motivation and willingness to be involved in extracurricular activities, their personality, and ability to engender enthusiasm, etc. These factors are more easily "caught" than taught, and teacher educators are role models in these respects. Even so, formal attention needs to be paid to these variables during training, as they have such powerful effects on the classroom climate and learning.

Having defined the ideal teacher profile, it is the place of the college of education to organise a programme that will deliver a supply of new teachers that meets the target.

Preservice Curriculum Components

The preset curriculum should, I suggest, embrace the major areas below. Each of these might be viewed and defined as a separate syllabus (in the British sense of the word) within the curriculum. This model is based closely on the curriculum which is currently being piloted by the Modern Languages Department at the Ecole Normale Sup,ieure d'Abidjan. While no single model will suit every context, it is content details that should vary, not curriculum outlines. I believe that any training institution which neglects any one of these important areas should seek to justify the exclusion. For each syllabus area, there are examples of what might be included, but these are only samples.

Area one: Pedagogic techniques. Examples of "techniques" are elicitation and nomination strategies, conducting efficient and meaningful drills, presenting lexical items and grammar points, introducing and practicing communicative structures, using body language, etc. Later, trainees learn to mix techniques, in reviewing previously taught material, setting and checking homework, exploiting texts, conducting role plays, etc.

Area two: Materials development. In this category trainees might learn how to adapt instructional materials, devise games and work sheets, create manipulatives and other aids, and develop passage-related reading or listening tasks together with supplementary exercises and activities (from controlled to communicative). They should also learn to produce original learning and teaching materials and to design tests related to materials, pedagogy, desired outcome, etc.

Area three: Management skills. Good class management is vital with large classes. Trainees must practise establishing and monitoring pair and group work, giving classroom commands, keeping records and student profiles, using peer marking, involving the whole class, timing a lesson, maintaining attention and discipline, encouraging and managing debate, using eye contact, and so on. In view of the importance of teacher personality in language teaching (far greater than in any other subject), the syllabus for this area should include a unit devoted to the nurturing of favorable attitudes and the development of charisma.

Area four: Professional knowledge. Clearly, new entrants to schools should be familiar with routine school administration. They must know the objectives of EFL and the nature of examinations and the instructional materials they will use. They should know something of curriculum design and optional methodologies. They need to know the shape of a range of balanced lesson types, and the principles of examination design and student evaluation. Teachers need to recognise systematic errors and obtain feedback from them. They need to know correction strategies, and about teacher observation and appraisal techniques. They also need to know about aspects of target civilisations if they are to perform as educators rather than mere teachers of the language.

Area five: Applied theory. Theoretical components are best taken parallel to or after the practical elements above. In this way theory is linked to the rest of the training curriculum and to philosophies of education. A school-based research approach is better than a purely academic one. Trainees can easily go into schools and identify different teaching styles and methods; they can watch learners and identify different cognitive modes and learning strategies; they can check language development, and the level of monitoring at different lesson stages. The aim of a

theoretical course is to enable the trainees to reflect on classroom practice and evaluate pedagogic options.

Area six: Lift. Language improvement for teachers, has no direct relationship to pedagogy and teacher training. Unfortunately, some training colleges spend most of their time on language work and evaluate trainees by means of examinations that appraise linguistic competence instead of the all-important pedagogic skills. Ideally, trainees should have an adequate degree of fluency before entering a college of education and this can be assured simply by raising the level of qualification at entry. In any case, language improvement results from teaching the other five curriculum elements in English. Where trainers feel obliged to strengthen trainees' language skills, though, it is essential that the approaches exemplify good pedagogy. In this way, trainees will assimilate teaching techniques and become aware of learner strategies. Trainees in a *lift* programme should read widely in English, be thrust into contact with current affairs, global issues, social concerns, local business, economic issues, the target cultures and so on. In this way, teacher preparation and language teaching is not divorced from the real world.

Native-speaker TEFL/TESOL trainees have quite different needs that must be addressed. Such trainees are often singularly unaware of English grammar. As well as becoming acquainted with pedagogic grammar, they should be made aware of contrasts with their students' mother tongue(s). The short, sharp shock of having to learn a language distant from their own, just for a few weeks, can also have a salutary effect.

Assembling the Teacher Education Curriculum

When components in the major areas above have been decided, they must be sequenced within syllabuses, so that the most vital elements are covered first, important areas come next and the least essential come last. To sort the constituent parts in this way to construct five or six coherent syllabuses (which together comprise the PRESET curriculum) is not particularly difficult, but relationship and interdependency must be considered. Is this technique (strategy, piece of knowledge, etc.) essential for novice teachers? If so, it should be part of a unit at an early level; if not, it can be covered later.

Once agreed upon and sequenced, the coherent curriculum must be covered effectively; and the ways in which it is covered are as important as the content itself if the outcome is to produce good teachers.

Training Modes

A common element in any teacher preparation curriculum should be variety in its presentation, just as there should be a variety of approaches in schools. Training approaches might include:

- ***The frontal mode*** . Often called the teacher-centered mode (teaching should never be teacher dominated), this mode is appropriate for panel work, demonstrations, brainstorming sessions, certain types of discussion, Socratic dialogue, task-based viewing of video lessons, introduction of new materials, etc. Often, trainees can prepare and deliver the presentations and demonstrations instead of the trainer.
- ***The experiential mode*** . This is an approach in which trainees sample teacher and learner roles in peer teaching and micro-teaching situations. Clearly, it relates to the frontal mode, above, but there is usually a focus on process rather than content. In this way, trainees can try out different management techniques and styles, experience test-taking, language learning, working in pairs and groups, etc.
- ***The workshop mode*** . This suits materials production, lesson planning, textbook analysis, the design of tests, the development of visual aids, etc.
- ***The pair/group work mode*** . This is most likely to involve most of the trainees for most of the time. This mode is used mainly for clearly specified tasks, usually leading to some form of sharing or pooling the results or opinions in a frontal mode.
- ***The individualised mode*** . This allows trainees to take responsibility for their own learning, with occasional meetings with trainers. This mode is best for readings and private study and for one-to-one trainee evaluation and counseling. Individualisation is also used in designing and carrying out classroom research, working on independent projects, conducting specialised fields of study, and so on. Done properly, individualised learning will steer trainees towards autonomy and wean them from over-dependence on advisers.

Teacher Records and Training

It is not the purpose of this paper to address issues of curriculum design for continuing teacher development, but when trainees become teachers they should be required to continue their professional education. This can now become more reflective as well as instrumental. A lot can be done autonomously (observing colleagues, reading, etc.) but a great deal should be done through participation in graded in-service schemes designed to build upon their initial training. To work with groups of teachers on day-release (or weekends or during holiday time), is far more efficient than trying to work with teachers one at a time in classrooms, especially where the groups are reasonably homogeneous in terms of pre-service training and experience in schools. Crucial units in such a scheme should be compulsory, forming a national common-core curriculum.

Elements of this curriculum can be treated in a unit-credit way, so that teachers build up a series of credits. With waystage certificates, one for every six unit-credits, teachers can work towards attainable short-term targets instead of viewing their professional development as an indistinct and ill-defined whole. Their certificates, on which are marked the unit-credits obtained, act as a record of training and provide a profile on the basis of which advisors can observe lessons, evaluate teachers (and training), analyse further needs, and counsel teachers.

Classroom intervention is far too costly for developing countries because of its one-to-one demand on advisers. What is more, classroom intervention only works well when used with

teachers who are already trained, and are sensitive to pedagogic options and related theories. Yet many advisers find themselves forced into an in-class training mode because of a lack of provision for structured pre-service training of the kind described above. Classroom supervision and counseling. cannot serve as a band-aid for insufficient initial training. It makes sense in both educational and economic terms to require all new teachers to be the products of a well-designed PRESET programme. Even a comparatively short programme will make the world of difference to what happens in schools.

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